

“Everyone needs compassion”



Christchurch Cathedral

Christchurch, not the college, not the small retirement town in Dorset but the city in New Zealand hit the headlines in 2011 when the cathedral was brought down in an earthquake that struck the island. The cathedral was a centre point for the community. When faced with what to do following the earthquake they had to shut the cathedral and plan a rebuild.



The rebuild would take decades to achieve but determined to celebrate Christ’s love in their community they came up with a plan and rebuilt their cathedral out of cardboard and moved into temporary accommodation. This was not just any cardboard building as you can see from the photograph. They had a vision that they wanted Christ at the centre their vision for a new cathedral would take time and they needed to come up with a solution. The cathedral continues to “feed” the spiritual need of people and is a reminder of what can be achieved, even with cardboard when Christ is at the centre. This leads me nicely onto the picnic.



What Jesus can do with a picnic.

What a picnic, plenty to go around in the end, this was not the case at the start. How could they feed so many, how could they amongst all that chaos serve food to every person. Jesus is a good person to have at a gathering.

In our bible reading we heard about what Jesus did with a young lads picnic. He took it gave thanks and then fed 5000 men probably around 15,000 people. We are told because he had compassion for them. But reading into the passage not only was he feeding them food, prior to this he had spent the time with his disciples feeding them spiritually. Speaking into their lives through him and his disciples, challenging them to see the world in a different way.

We are reminded of the quote “he who can do immeasurably more than we can imagine.” When something moves us, it may be the crisis in Sudan or a family in need, a child that needs support and redirection. Having the courage to share a difficult message in a way that shows compassion to the person and a commitment to their future. Courage, Compassion and Commitment. With Jesus a few resources and some compassion can inspire a people and a nation.



Feeding the 55 thousand

Today I do not just want to talk about the feeding of the 5 thousand, I also want to talk about the feeding of the 55,000. Before you start to ask 55,000 what is he talking about let me put some context within that. There are 55,000 young people who attend Church of England Schools and that is just in the Diocese of Oxford. So in our Diocese tomorrow morning 55,000 young people will be attending a school that is a distinctively Christian school in our Diocese. Sometimes it is perceived through our media that our values are diminishing, in church news we are often hearing of diminishing congregations however I really want to bring a message of hope today to say that these schools are a jewel in the crown in the development of the mission of the Church. In our own community here we have our very own Church of England school attached to this church and just down the road in Sunninghill and south ascot you will find more church schools. Also we have Roman Catholic Church schools in this area. The church is very much alive in these schools. An important part of each of these schools is the values and the characteristics that make it distinctive in its Christian ethos.

How are we feeding them

In my own school we have looked at the values that we believe underpin the Christian faith and defined them as clearly as we can to our young people. When you come into Churchmead School it will now probably be no surprise to you that you will see the words, Courage, Compassion and Commitment banded everywhere in the school. These values we see as a way of making the Holy Trinity of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit accessible to young people. The courage to do the will of God, The compassion to demonstrate the love of Christ and the commitment to carry out the work of the spirit.

Churchmead is a very international school, it is a point of celebration in the school 50 different nationalities represented, forty different first languages. Approximately 1/3 are from Christian backgrounds 1/3 Muslim and 1/3 from Hindu and Sikh backgrounds. We are a diverse community and it's a part of my work that I really enjoy. We celebrate the Christian faith as part of this rich diverse community, every student will visit our local church throughout the year for various special celebrations.

Courage, Compassion and commitment form part of our identity as a school so much so that you Occasionally you hear certain students saying "Oh no Mr Tomes is banging on about the three C's again."

A few weeks ago we started the day with collective worship in which every student attends. Every week there is a thought for the week inspired by a piece of scripture. The focus was on making mistakes. The focus was the prodigal son returning and the compassion shown by the father on his return. It was a challenge because for the few I had to speak to in my office that week after making a mistake what is the theme of the week, when the student says being forgiven and showing compassion to people making mistakes.

We all make mistakes and we do need to learn from them. We can be inspired by the compassion Jesus had for people and the way he admonished people.



This leads me onto the wheelbarrow.

Just before half term Jimmy a student at my school decided at the end of lunch when no one was looking got a friend and went around to the caretakers shed. The Wheel barrow was outside he decided to take the wheel barrow and put his friend in the wheel barrow and then push him around in it. Unfortunately he did not realise that pushing the wheel barrow past the staffroom window was not the cleverest of ideas. Staff picked him up for this. I had been out at a meeting when I returned I was informed of this.

So I thought “what would Jesus do” in this situation, staff very unhappy that he had misbehaved and not done as he was told, this was one of those students who wouldn’t necessarily bang on about the three C’s if that was me how would I want Jesus to admonish me (the reality being that when I was 14 that was me...a story for another time) and I paused for a moment and thought about the words “what would Jesus do.” After a short time praying about it clear what needed to happen. Problem with telling the students to show compassion is that I have to model it.

I went and found Jimmy the only words I said was “Follow me.”

He then followed me expecting to go to the office we then walked outside right around to the place where he had hidden the wheelbarrow. “Fetch that and follow me.” He took the wheel barrow and followed me to the centre of the field.”

That litter needs to be in the wheel barrow. He did it. I took him to two other places, without saying much he just picked up the litter again and put in the wheel barrow. I took him to the bins and said “That rubbish needs to be in there”

At the end I said “that is how to use a wheel barrow- point taken.”

With a wry smile he said “Point taken sir” and went back to class.

I was so grateful for the moment to think about Christ compassion in that situation, inspired by Jesus in a lesson that I do not think Jimmy will ever forget.



Compassion – a problem shared

Jay John the Christian speaker, defines compassion as a problem shared. In the bible people brought problems to Jesus and shared with him, Jesus was able to respond to them. “your faith has healed you he said to the man on the stretcher. The blind see, the deaf hear. The New Testament is full of accounts of when Jesus responds with compassion to the needs of an individual. What are the problems we are being called to share in at this time it could be in the community at work, on the international stage, the crisis in East Africa, the middle East, in our schools with our friends.

Compassion through Lent 40 acts

So last time I talked I left you with some homework, 40 acts of lent, it starts on Wednesday and the first few acts are here to look at:

Wednesday – Give someone a compliment

Thursday – Tidy up for someone else without being asked

Friday – Send a letter or card of encouragement to someone

Let’s take heart that we are part of a diocese that is feeding 55,000 young people a Christian education, in which the compassion of Jesus is shared on a daily basis.

Let’s also encourage one another through lent to show the compassion of Christ through our commitment to our faith.

Let us pray.